

The Lengthening Shadow of Government

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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Published May, 1954

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THE FOUNDATION FOR
ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.
IRVINGTON-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK

THE LENGTHENING SHADOW OF GOVERNMENT



TRY AN experiment. Take a blank map of the United States and shade in about 3 per cent of the area. This represents the amount of the total national wealth, exclusive of land, owned by government in 1902. Now extend the shadow until it covers 9 per cent of the area; this is the percentage of wealth owned by government in 1922. For a few years thereafter, the white area cuts back into the shadow before the trend resumes. Shade 13 per cent of the area for 1939, 22 per cent for 1946, and approximately 27 per cent for 1954. It is only a matter of time, if this trend continues, before 100 per cent ownership is achieved by government.*

The trend is continuing. Translated, this reads: Some of us with political power will own everything; others of us will be allowed to own nothing.

ELECTRICITY

A SIMILAR pattern may be traced in various industries. Put a dot on the map for the first federal power production in 1903. Then shade 10.7 per cent of the area to represent the proportion of the total generating capacity in the United States presently

*Map on pages 14 and 15.

owned by the federal government. With the completion of construction now in progress or scheduled by both government and private utilities for the next two years, the federal government will own 15.4 per cent by the end of 1955. The corresponding figure for all public ownership (federal, state, and local) is 23.8 per cent. When the generation of electrical power from atomic energy is economically feasible, the federal government will have a monopoly under present laws. For all practical purposes, the shaded area takes over.

EDUCATION

THERE is also a lengthening shadow in the field of higher education. In a recent study published by Columbia University, it is stated that the federal government, in a typical postwar year (1947) spent just about 500 million dollars of the one billion dollars that it cost the colleges to operate. If we shade in a map labeled "higher education," there would be an equal division between light and dark areas. But if the education picture were extended to include secondary education and all levels of government, the shaded area would cover all but about 10 per cent.

In nearly every line of endeavor, there is a repetition of the same story. We can pre-

pare shaded maps till our patience vanishes, and in almost every field we investigate, the darkened area relentlessly advances year by year.

Government encroaches more and more upon the area of personal relations. We are affected in a variety of ways, no matter what our occupation or station in life. Nearly every healthy youngster now growing up will encounter military service before reaching maturity; and, if he is lucky enough to survive, he will emerge from military service into a society where his life will continue to be politically regulated and controlled to a large extent.

TWO VIEWPOINTS

THE FACTS are beyond dispute; government is occupying an ever more prominent place in our lives. But what is the significance of this trend? Discussion ranges back and forth over this question, seldom reaching a satisfactory conclusion. For some, the trend spells progress, while others deplore it. Each camp has its own picture of what political action really means, and the pictures are not alike. There is little precise understanding of what changes take place in human relationships as a consequence of government intervention. When government undertakes any action, the new situation created by

political involvement needs to be described in more realistic terms than are commonly used.

VIOLENCE

THE LEAST common denominator of all political action is violence or the threat of violence. Law adds enforcement and penalties to a general rule; men are forbidden to do what they otherwise would do, or they are made to do what they otherwise would not do. All government action is predicated upon government's willingness to use its basic instruments—its armies, police, courts, and jails.

At first thought, it seems extravagant to declare that the introduction of government into any human relationship means the introduction of violence into that relationship. Our perception is not tuned to sense violence unless it is 100 per cent violence, and overt. When violence is less than 100 per cent, and covert, we tend to be unaware of it unless the facts are brought home to us by reason. We know, for instance, that the relationships in a prison are not based upon voluntary consent. All, or nearly all, the persons confined would prefer to be elsewhere; but their wishes are not consulted and they are held against their wills. There is *covert* violence in this situation, and only

occasionally is there a prison riot with the covert violence becoming overt.

THE MORALIST AND VIOLENCE

VIOLENCE doesn't have to erupt before it becomes a concern of the moralist; covert violence is also within his legitimate field of study. After violence erupts and results in bloodied and bruised bodies, the medical man has work to do. But the detection of violence in its covert forms is a task of the moralist, because his is the science of human relations.

It is true that all life has been touched by violence at some time or place, and human action seems sporadically violent. But political action *invariably* carries undertones of violence in whatever it does. Once this nature of political action is understood, the matter of its limitation occupies a central place in moral philosophy.

A tiny grain of musk will scent a room for years; one part of dye will stain a million parts of water. In each of these cases, the effect is measured more by the intensity than by the amount of the cause. So it is with violence; a little of it goes a long way toward determining the quality and nature of the situation in which it is present. When violence is present in any quantity, it tends to take over.

SLAVERY

Violence undeniably brooked over the Ol' Plantation. Yet the enchanting scenes sketched in scores of ante-bellum novels suggest the most idyllic conditions this side of the Green Pastures; the folks of quality sipping their mint juleps, the house servants attired in gorgeous livery, the field hands honestly tired from their day's work and finding rest by lifting their voices in haunting song. Violence on the Ol' Plantation? Those accustomed to this life would be dumbfounded at the suggestion, and would deny it vehemently. But we know that every master-slave relationship is instituted and maintained by violence.

Slavery, to be sure, is held in place by other factors too, such as inertia and despair, habit and custom. But "the peculiar institution" would not long endure in any society if it were propped up by these other things alone. Slavery rests upon violence, which only rarely discloses itself as overt violence.

"PROTECTION"

A long black automobile containing four men pulls up and stops in front of a cleaning establishment. A sleek looking gent gets out and goes in. He talks quietly to the proprietor, and the latter is only too happy to

agree to a weekly payment of money in order to be protected against the demolition of his shop by bombing. There is no overt violence here. Mobsters do not live by the kind of open mob violence that makes headlines; they live by covert violence. But the fact that so little of a mobster's energy breaks out into overt violence does not conceal the truth that violence is the medium by which he lives.

The elegant society thief, Raffles, abhorred violence. And to the casual observer, what could be further from violence than this man, in his immaculate evening clothes, "accepting" a diamond brooch from this lady, or a pearl necklace from that? Nothing appeared so vulgar in this scene as blood or bruises; Raffles couldn't stand either. And so that he would not have to produce either, he courteously *requested* that his fellow guests hand over their valuables. But we are not deceived by surface appearances. Raffles lived by violence, no less real for being covert.

The scene in which the valuables changed hands was charged with violence, but the violence was in the upper register of the spectrum beyond the range of our senses — like the ultra-violet rays in sunlight. Just as we have to shift gears in our apparatus of perception to detect ultra-violet rays, just so do we have to augment our senses to de-

tect the violence in an act of robbery when the victim "cooperates." But most of us understand that even genteel robbery involves violence, and not violence in any vague sense.*

A VELVET GLOVE

NEITHER is the word violence used in any vague sense when it is said that all political action or government intervention is violent. The violence in government is always implicit, only rarely explicit and overt; the mailed fist usually wears a velvet glove.

What is more, the mailed fist of government seems to be our own clenched hand. When the political structure is republican in form, it is only natural for us to assume the innocence of political action. After all, is not political action something we are doing to ourselves; and can we be accused of violating ourselves?

In a country occupied by a foreign power, it takes little discernment on the part of the conquered people to know what political action really is. Its violent nature is unabash-

*Clever schemes of education, propaganda, or persuasion are sometimes loosely termed "mental violence" by the purveyors of other clever schemes. But all such schemes seek to gain the assent of the will, whereas the use or threat of actual violence is designed to override the will — a different matter entirely. Clever quacks are a serious enough problem, but a charlatan armed with political power is infinitely worse.

edly linked to the sword. And under a monarchy or an oligarchy, the ruling body is set off from the main body of citizens, so that the "lower" orders have little difficulty in recognizing the political burden they carry around on their backs. But when the personnel of officialdom is drawn indifferently from the rank and file of the citizenry, and is chosen by this citizenry to represent it, then the true nature of political action is concealed by a thick disguise. The government is ours, and it is given the sanction which each of us is so skillful in inventing to justify any line of conduct he feels inclined to engage in. Our adeptness at rationalization is put into the service of the government.

A RATIONALIZATION

THE FIRST form taken by the rationalization is that which says: "We are the government." Even if this statement corresponded to the facts, it would not speak on either side of the contention that all political action is implicitly violent. If "we" are the government, then it follows that political action has no ethical sanction for actions that would be ethically wrong when performed by "us" as individuals. It is generally regarded as wrong for any of us to injure any other of us—whether the injury be directed at body,

mind, or estate — unless the injury be the unavoidable result of legitimate self-defense. Therefore, if “we” are the government, it is also wrong for government to undertake action which injures any one in any way, except when the injury is an unavoidable by-product of an effort to restrain the aggressive person who is attempting to impose his will upon other peaceful persons.

When once it is understood that political action cannot take place otherwise than in an atmosphere of covert violence, then this first form of rationalization must accept one or the other of two alternatives: It must frankly condone overt violence whenever anyone is in the mood for it, or else it must condemn any political action which would be a wrong use of violence if we as individuals undertook it.

A THEORY OF GOVERNMENT

THE SECOND form of rationalization admits the distinction between government and people. The political agency, it recognizes, is a group of several million elected and appointed individuals in more or less permanent control of the instruments of government. It is observed that, in practice, the use that will be made of the political agency is determined by the weight that pressure groups can bring to bear on it at strategic

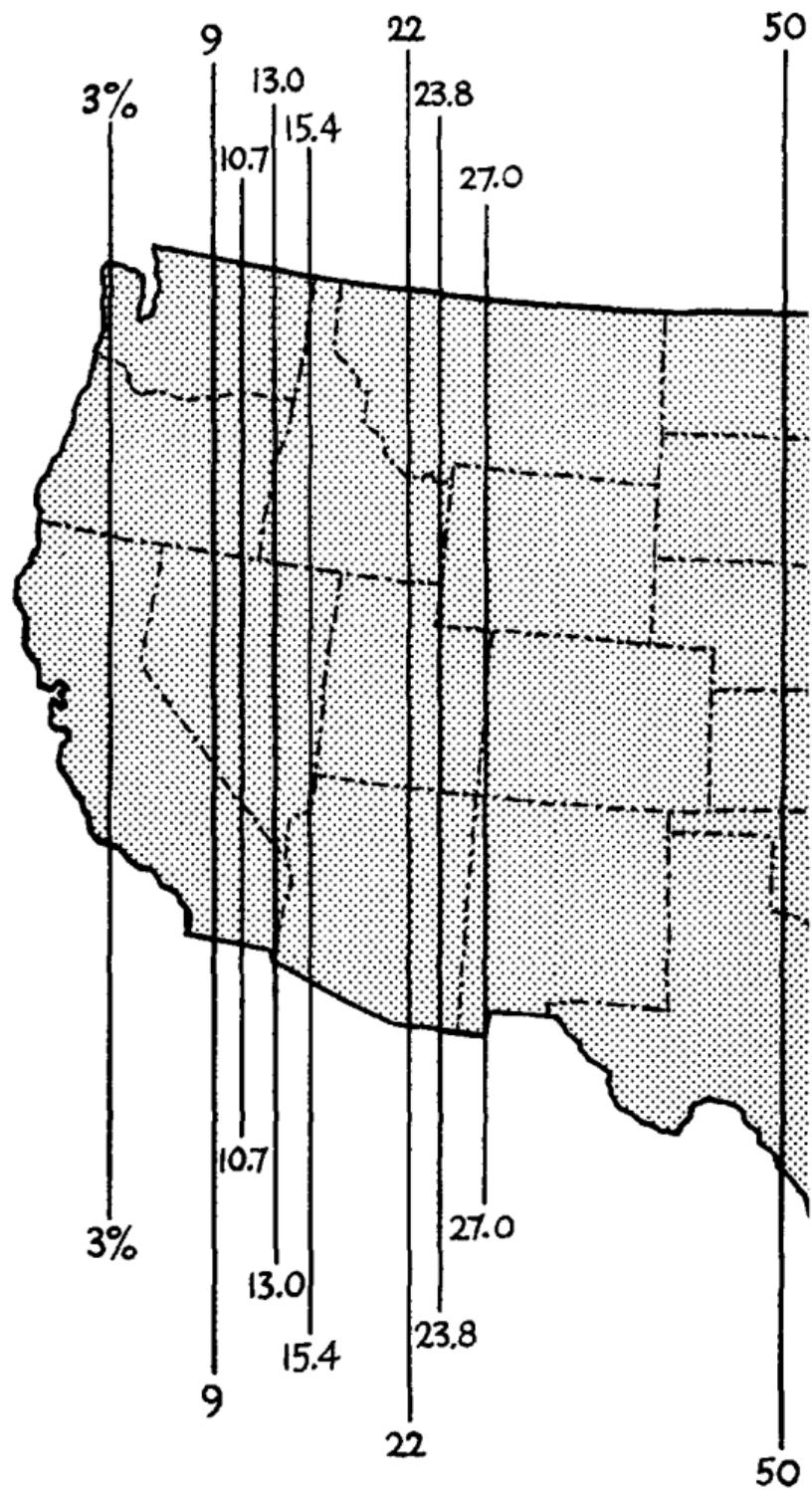
points. The line along which government will move is the resultant of the forces applied in different directions by conflicting groups in society. In this view, politics is the art of mustering interest groups and lobbying to gain privileges for them.

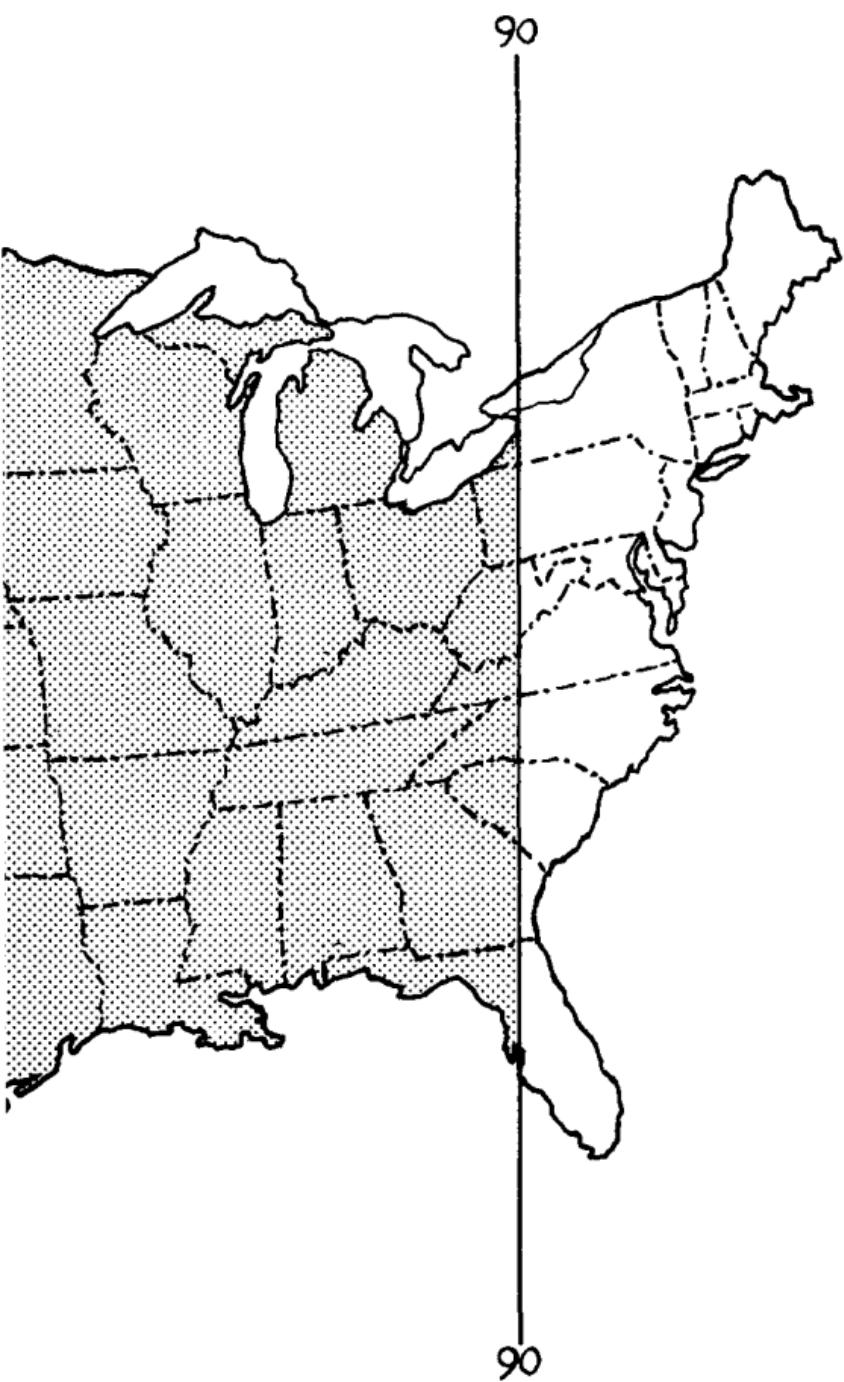
This is a sophisticated and widely held point of view. It is the view generally held by those who want to use government to provide better housing, more adequate diet, finer education, greater medical care, increased social security, and so on, naming the entire list of objectives which taken together comprise the welfare state.

GOOD OBJECTIVES

OVER these objectives, it may be said, there can be little dispute. All men of good will want to see all other persons better off economically. Thus there is little or no debate as to the objectives of the welfare state. But there is a serious question about the *means* employed to realize them, because means determine ends.

Granted that the ends of better housing, education, and health are desirable, what means shall be used to attain these ends? The collectivist or welfare-stater advocates the use of political action as the method for obtaining these objectives. The libertarian, on the other hand, believes that the nature





of political action makes it an unfit means for productive tasks. He would rely instead on the release of the creative energies of men and women working cooperatively and competitively, with government acting only to curb predation such as murder and fraud.

It is important to note that the collectivist or welfare-stater, while he tests the *objectives* by moral principles, does not apply moral judgments to his *means*. Actually, his ends are prefigured in the means he adopts. When pressed, he usually admits the covert violence implicit in political action; but he justifies his use of it by claiming that the people he hopes to help now are the innocent victims of political action of a previous era.

ROBBER BARONS

WHEN it is pointed out that two wrongs don't add up to a right, the collectivist cites the post Civil War period as a horrible example of a few freebooters and pirates preying upon the nation. He has a finely developed conscience over the wickedness of the "robber barons." When his attention is called to the fact that the plundering of that era was done with the help of political intervention and was perfectly legal, he replies: "Maybe so, but it was immoral." Now call his attention to the fact that the principle

of plunder of that era — that is, using political action to give some people an advantage at the expense of others — is the principle of the welfare state and all other forms of modern collectivism. Point out to him that, by his own characterization, his principle is immoral. When he finally understands his untenable moral position, he will reply: "Yes, but it's legal."

Pressed still further, the welfare-stater takes refuge in the notion that political plunder is today spread more evenly to more people, which gives it a moral advantage over the political intervention of the post Civil War period. Thus the collectivist position comes perilously close to making morality a function of time and numbers; what was wrong three quarters of a century ago is right now, and what was wrong for a few then is right now for many.

A NECESSARY CHOICE

Now it is possible to argue that there is no such thing as morality; that there is only custom, habit, legislation, and mores. But if there is such a thing as morality, it is the idea that some things are right and ought to be pursued though the heavens fall, and that these things are independent of time and numbers.

The collectivist cannot have it both ways.

If he seeks to apply moral principles to ends and means alike, then his own means are suspect because they violate the moral norms which most persons recognize as binding upon themselves as individuals. If he ceases to apply moral principles to his ends, as he has never applied them to his means, he will lose his chief stock in trade — his tedious moralizing about what he is going to do for some people when he commands the resources of other people.

Government has the means of compelling assent to its decrees; it is the social apparatus of coercion. Its apparatus has always been available for those who gain control of it to be used by them for ends which they regard as desirable. But persistently throughout history, the political apparatus has been used by some of us seeking some advantage for ourselves at the expense of others of us. Control of the political apparatus gives a legal sanction to predation, reversing the true function of government which is to curb predation.

SOCIETY IN OPERATION

Most of life in society is peaceable. People usually get along with each other. And when they don't, they make efforts to adjust their difficulties smoothly. In the relationships of marriage, business, and recrea-

tion — in schools, churches, lodges, and welfare organizations — the major ties that bind are love, mutuality, common interest, hiring and employment, bargaining and contract, voluntary agreements, fellowship, shared beliefs, custom, habit, moral obligation, and self-interest. These things bring people together for voluntary cooperation and competition and for the pleasures to be gained from the company of others of our own species.

There is no necessary violence in the myriad relations men in society have with each other, as there is necessary violence in the life of the thief or the mobster or the slaveholder. Occasionally, it is true, violence does occur in one of these situations; a husband beats a wife, a writer libels a man he doesn't like, a storekeeper cheats a customer, a teller embezzles, a man is murdered. The peace of society has been broken, violence has intruded into a hitherto non-violent situation; but such intrusions are exceptional. Among primitives, a breach of the peace might result in acts of personal revenge or a blood feud, but a more complex society evolves an immense and complicated body of law to define reciprocal rights and duties in society, and to offer redress to those injured by the violence of others. The injured wife or the cheated customer has the offending person collared by

the constable and locked in jail. For this act of violence by the political agency, there are moral as well as legal sanctions; it is based squarely on the moral right of the individual to defend himself against the murderer or thief.

THE FUNCTION OF GOVERNMENT

IN ORDER to redress injury, the political agency intervenes with violence on behalf of the injured person, neutralizing by its action the privately initiated violence. All that government does in this rather simple negative intervention, is to use its allotment of violence to cancel out or annul the violence that had partially paralyzed and poisoned the hitherto peaceful relationship.

In brief, there is a social use for violence properly used. The political agency, which wields power for society with society's consent, preserves the peaceful business of society by restraining those who break the peace by initiating violence. This division of labor permits the individual to devote his full time to productive efforts instead of having to use much of his time carrying a gun to defend himself.

But suppose that when the wife-beater has sobered up after a night in the cell and is pleading to go back to his family, the political agency should reason thusly: "We

did so well last night in preventing this man from inflicting further injury on his wife, that it seems irresponsible to limit ourselves to these negative functions. Let's act positively and use the power of government to make this man love his wife. If he declines at first to go along with us, we'll lock him up until he sees things our way."

INSTRUMENTS OF GOVERNMENT

THE ABSURDITY of this needs no comment. Whatever the good intentions of those who comprise the political agency, and of those who urge it to take a more positive position in human affairs, government can act only with the instruments at its disposal. The instruments of government are armies, police, courts, and jails — all means of committing violence. Government cannot be other than it is. While it may and does attempt to use its instruments of violence for productive purposes — the Post Office, for example — the result is inevitably second rate because it is a monopoly based on the threat of violence against would-be competitors.

Due to the nature of government, political action is always violent action — covert violence for the most part, but violence nevertheless. The nature of government limits the ends which can be achieved by using it as a means. An appropriate instru-

ment to restrain people, it is not appropriate to making them love each other, produce more goods, or engage in any creative activity.

GOLF

IT IS NOT difficult to see the violence implicit in the characteristic instruments basic to government, but it is sometimes difficult to detect the violent features in certain ventures of government which seem peaceful enough on the surface. For example, government builds a golf course, and some people who could not before afford golf now enjoy its benefits. Where is the violence? It is not at the level where people play around the course, but at the level where people are forced to surrender part of the fruits of their labor to pay for the construction of the course.

Those who will never use the course are forced to pay for it nonetheless, along with those who will use it. If those who are opposed to a public golf course refuse to pay whatever the government orders them to pay, the covert violence inherent in all political action will erupt in overt violence toward them. They will go to jail or suffer some other penalty. If they resist the government official sent to arrest them — well, what happens to persons who resist arrest?

If those who cannot afford to play golf were to take money directly from those who have it in order to indulge their taste for the game, they would be stigmatized as thieves. The apparatus of government would move against them and deal with them as they deserve. But if these same would-be golfers learn to get the money indirectly, using government as their means of so doing, then the situation is turned inside out. They are handed the benefits of cheap golf. And their victims, if they balk, are treated as criminals!

PUBLIC HOUSING

PUBLIC housing seems like a beneficent activity of government. Does it not clear slums and give people something they really need? Public housing provides a few people with better housing than they could otherwise afford. But — the price gap between what they can afford and what they get has to be met, and it is met out of the funds of other people. To the extent that those in public housing benefit, those not in public housing lose.

Furthermore, these losers are also forced to pay the political costs of being deprived of what is rightfully theirs for the dubious benefit of those to whom it is given. Economic and political considerations reveal

that government intervention is a poor means of getting the most low-cost housing units for those who need them; while the government can decree *low rents* on its housing units by forcing some persons to subsidize other persons, the total costs of such a procedure are invariably higher than the costs of private ownership and personal responsibility.

But our stress here is on moral rather than material considerations. Injury is deliberately done to some people by political action on the false assumption that there will be a compensating advantage to others. Taking what rightfully belongs to anyone, no matter how much he has, is morally wrong even though the stolen goods be put to some good use. That which is immoral when it is illegal, is still immoral even after majority vote has made it lawful.

IMMORAL MEANS

SIMILAR considerations apply to every plank in the welfare-stater's platform. The planks are sold to the public in terms of the objectives, which have every appearance of being desirable. It is only when we turn to the means that we perceive the immorality. Relying on political action to attain their ends, the collectivists are forced to rely on means which are undeniably immoral when

measured by the code which is binding upon individuals. The means are immoral because they are inseparable from the use or threat of violence against peaceful persons, and bad means cannot achieve good ends. Do not ends pre-exist in the means?

The trend in this country toward greater government intervention in the creative efforts of men means that the peaceable social bonds that unite men in interpersonal relationships will be replaced gradually by compulsory regulations. To the extent that government encroaches upon the lives of individuals, violence gains control and cripples human affairs.

THE REAL PROBLEM

THESE are few men who openly advocate overt violence, and they are a relatively minor problem. People are put on their guard by belligerent talk and can cope with violent men. The real problem is that men advocate violence, without knowing that they advocate it, to an audience unaware that violence is being advocated. The problem is complicated by the fact that the kind of violence advocated is not what the average person thinks about when he hears or uses the term.

When violence is covert, legal, and approved by a majority, it is more deadly by

reason of its disguises. It works stealthily to increase friction in society and to erode and corrupt social bonds.

The shadow lengthens, political intervention and control increases, men rely more and more on violence to gain their ends. We careen, unwittingly, toward the servile state. This eventuality is not being forced upon us; we are doing it to ourselves, largely in ignorance of what it is we are really doing.

THE PRIMARY TASK

THE PRIMARY task is one of translation. We need to translate the meaning of political action into plain language and precise terms. Then there will be the open advocates of violence on the one hand; and on the other, the advocates of love, good will, cooperation, and competition. Once confronted by clear-cut alternatives, almost every man can choose in full knowledge of the meaning of his choice. But until we understand what is happening to us and why, the shadow will continue to lengthen.

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